



In Touch South India

Headlines from the U.S. Consulate General Chennai



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America Votes 2008

The day after Barack Obama became the first African-American to be elected to the U.S. presidency, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice called the election “an extraordinary step forward” for the nation. “Americans are not going to be satisfied until they really do form that perfect union” she said, referring to the preamble of the Constitution, which begins: “We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union...” She was reflecting on the fact that American democracy was not fully formed at the time of adoption of the Constitution in 1789, nor is it today. As late as 1857, in the notorious Dred Scott decision, later superseded by amendments to the Constitution, the Supreme Court ruled that a black person could not be “regarded as a citizen or one of the people.”

It was a long time before most Americans acquired voting rights. In some states in the early days of the republic, Catholics and Jews were not permitted to vote or hold elective office. Women battled for decades before attaining the franchise in 1920. Although African-Americans technically acquired the right to vote with passage of the 15th Amendment to the Constitution in 1870, it took nearly a century of protest and struggle before the Voting Rights Act of 1965 eliminated literacy and other tests that had systematically disenfranchised African-Americans in many parts of the United States.



Smiles all around as President-elect Obama delivers his victory speech.

This history of the hard-sought franchise gives Americans good cause for celebrating a national election. The Consulate General invited friends in Chennai and beyond to an “Open House” at the Hotel Taj Coromandel to watch election returns in the morning of November 5. Although Americans were voting for many offices on Election Day, all eyes were focused on the race for president between John McCain and Barack Obama. Visa officer Kelly Kopcial explained to the huge crowd that had gathered the United States’ arcane method for electing a president through an Electoral College. While critics say the system is too complicated and imperfectly reflects the national popular will, defenders point out that it has helped the country avoid the excessive political fragmentation that afflicts some democracies. Other Consulate officers spoke on the phenomenon of early and absentee voting, the importance of the youth vote, and Indian-American involvement in the political process.

The fun part of the Open House was participating in a mock poll and a “Guess the Electoral Vote” contest. Curiously, while the crowd overwhelmingly supported Obama, only half predicted his victory. Many of the guests believed that the racial divide in America could not be transcended. When the election was called for Obama, however, these same people were delighted to be proved wrong. While McCain supporters with

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044-2857-4000

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044-2811-2020



All of us at the Consulate General were shocked and saddened by the terrible attacks in Mumbai that killed and injured hundreds of people. On November 29, President Bush expressed what we Americans feel about this tragedy:

On behalf of all Americans, Laura and I extend our condolences to those suffering from the terrorist attacks in Mumbai, India. We mourn those who lost their lives, including American citizens. We pray that the injured will recover. We pledge the full support of the United States as India investigates these attacks, brings the guilty to justice, and sustains its democratic way of life... The killers who struck this week are brutal and violent, but terror will not have the final word... The leaders of India can know that nations around the world support them in the face of this assault on human dignity. And as the people of the world's largest democracy recover from these attacks, they can count on the world's oldest democracy to stand by their side... May God bless the people of India.

- Andrew T. Simkin, Consul General

In Memoriam



The Consulate General-Chennai mourns the sudden passing of our dear friend and colleague Suresh Rajamiyer. A dedicated U.S. Commercial Service Clerk/Chauffeur for 15 years, Suresh brought laughter and cheer to his office and to all he encountered. He loved music and was a loving and devoted family man, survived by his mother, his wife and two teenage sons.

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good humor licked their wounds, there were cheers and some tears of joy when Obama appeared on the giant screen to make his victory speech from Chicago. With regard to the contest, it turned out that no one guessed the winning candidate's electoral vote precisely (it was 365), but the Consulate General gave prizes to the four people who came the closest.

The emergence of an African-American president does not signal the end of racial prejudice in the United States, but it is, without doubt, a milestone in U.S. history. It is another piece of evidence that the American union, while not perfect, is perfectible, and that people of all colors and creeds can come together in common cause. Most important, as Secretary Rice put it, again citing the preamble of the Constitution, "We the people" is beginning to mean all of us."

Intellectual Property Rights

In the Hindu epic Mahabharata, the master archer Drona refuses to take Ekalavya as a student. So Ekalavya fashions a clay image of Drona which he worships and in this way learns to become an exceptional archer. His skills rise to the level of those of Arjuna, Drona's favorite pupil. To keep his promise to Arjuna that no one would become his equal in archery, Drona exacts a steep teacher's fee (guru dakshina) from Ekalavya, his right thumb.

The story of Ekalavya was told by Chief Justice A.K. Ganguly of the Madras High Court to illustrate the concept of intellectual property rights (IPR). He, along with Justices M. Jai-chandran and V. Dhanapalan and Special Public Prosecutor Geetha Ramaseshan, addressed a group of judges, advocates and law students on the subject of IPR during a November 14 roundtable discussion sponsored jointly by the Madras Bar Association and the American Library - Chennai.

The roundtable participants focused on the economic necessity of an effective IPR regime and the role of the legal community in ensuring IPR protection. International cooperation is also essential; the United States and India are working together to build capacity and increase public awareness. Both countries recognize that, just as Drona had a stake in protecting his intellectual property in ancient times, pharmaceutical, film, music and software industries today, wherever they may be, need strong IPR enforcement to survive and prosper.

Positive Images



Officers of the Consulate General and Mr. Wayne Dalton, father of another officer, prepare to carve the Thanksgiving turkey.

Ambassador Mulford and Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y.S.R. Reddy plant a sapling at the new American Consulate—Hyderabad.



Librarians from Afghanistan, Burma, Cambodia, Ethiopia, Fiji, Iran, Mauritius, Mongolia, Nigeria, Palestinian Territories, Philippines, Sudan, Uzbekistan, and Zambia visit the American Library—Chennai and are briefed by Library Director M.K. Jagadish.

International Education Week

At last count, there were 94,563 Indian students in U.S. colleges and universities. India has been the leading place of origin for foreign students in the United States since 2001, and the trend shows no sign of abating. While the number of Americans studying in India is small in comparison (2,627), the annual rate of growth (24%) is impressive.

Why are so many Indians and Americans studying in each others' countries? Indians, the majority of whom go to the United States at the gradu-



Janaka Pushpanathan, Regional Officer USIEF talking to students from DAV Girls Senior Secondary School, Gopalapuram, Chennai on November 19.

ate level, are attracted by top-flight educational opportunities primarily in the fields of engineering, computer science, business and management, physical and life sciences and the like. Many Americans in India focus on the study of Indian civilization – its languages, literature, history, religions, etc. Colleges and universities in both countries benefit from the presence of international students who contribute to an intellectual and cultural ferment on campus and in the wider community.

During International Education Week 2008, November 17-21, the United States-India Educational Foundation (USIEF) and the Consulate General invited representatives of Germany, Singapore, the United Kingdom and the United States to give their perspectives on “Internationalism, Individualism and Interchange” in a panel discussion at Anna University. U.S. Consul General Andrew Simkin drew on his own experience in a semester abroad program in Jerusalem which he described as “an intense and life-changing experience.” German Consul General Roland Herrmann said that “borderless education” would improve people-to-people relations around the world.

Later in the week USIEF organized a digital video conference at Loyola College linking the Tamil Nadu Principals' Association with the University of Dayton, Wright State University and Sinclair Community College, all in the state of Ohio in the United States. The discussion focused on the relative strengths and costs of study in U.S. private universities, public universities and two-year colleges. Many in India are not familiar with the American community college system, which at relatively low cost allows students to complete the first two years of the typical four years of undergraduate study.

The trend toward study abroad, for people of all nationalities, has myriad benefits. President Franklin Roosevelt spoke of knowledge of the wider world as a national priority: “A nation, like a person, has a mind – a mind that must be kept informed and alert, that must know itself, that understands the hopes and needs of its neighbors – all the other nations that live within the narrowing circle of the world.” Those words spoken in 1941 are even truer today.

Be Breast Cancer Aware

While breast cancer is on the rise in India, early detection gives a patient a 96-98% chance of recovery. This was the principal message of Dr. Vijayabharathi Rangarajan, a breast cancer specialist with CANSTOP (Cancer Support Therapy to Overcome Pain) who addressed 70 members of eWIT (Empowering Women in IT) in Chennai on November 7. The Consulate General in partnership with CANSTOP and eWIT organized the talk to coincide with Breast Cancer Awareness Month.

Dr. Rangarajan urged that women starting at 20 years old practice periodic self-examination and undergo clinical breast exams every three years until age 40 and annually thereafter. Unfortunately, embarrassment prevents some women from seeking diagnostic testing and life-saving treatment. Anyone who wants to know about treatment options for breast cancer, lifestyle changes in diet and exercise, and the role of family, friends and support groups in helping breast cancer patients can phone the CANSTOP helpline at 044-2628-4256.

What We Read

Aileen Crowe Nandi
Principal Commercial Officer

A New World
by Amit Chaudhuri

Chaudhuri deftly portrays new worlds converging as a family rebuilds itself and Calcutta gingerly enters globalization. With his tight prose and cinematic approach to writing, Chaudhuri depicts three generations of the Chatterjee family grappling with the aftermath of divorce and adjusting to retirement. Jayojit, returning to India from the U.S. to heal the wounds of an acrimonious custody battle, dreamily plods through his vacation with his son to visit his aging parents. Like the ex-wife left behind, the United States also serves as a character, providing contrasts to life in Calcutta's summer season.



Daniel G. Keen
Vice Consul

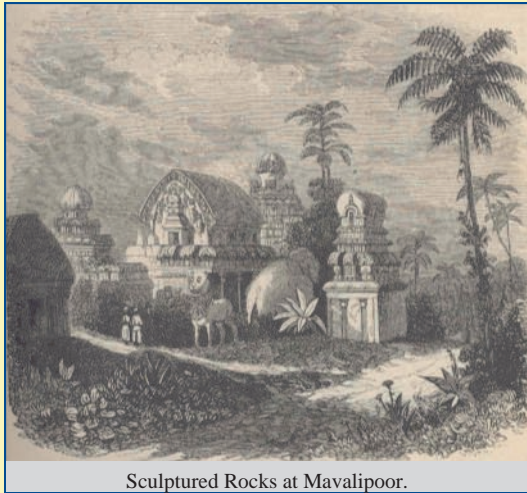
The Great Game
by Peter Hopkirk

The competition between Great Britain and the Russian Empire for control and influence in South and Central Asia is the subject of this riveting work of nonfiction. The British sought to command the key regions which guarded the approach to India, the crown jewel in their extensive overseas empire. The book focuses on the colorful players in the dangerous competition and portrays events that are eerily reminiscent of modern times. The story provides valuable lessons for both students and policy-makers.



Madras in 1857

The American affinity for Chennai dates back many years, as does commerce between India and the United States. One anonymous American, who came aboard a ship loaded with 500 tons of ice (due to melting during the 143-day voyage from Boston, only 190 tons were delivered), wrote a detailed account of his time in Madras in March-April 1857. The article was published the following year in Harper's Magazine along with several lithographic illustrations.



Sculptured Rocks at Mavalipoor.

The American was clearly enchanted by the “city of cities” and made sure he did not miss anything including Mamallapuram, “the great submarine city of temples.” Though he was to be in Madras only for a short time, he took daily Tamil lessons and tried to transcribe the words he heard on the street even if he did not understand their meaning. He visited “the palace of the Nawab, the descendants of the Nabobs of Arcot” in Triplicane and many other “picturesque parts of the city, by a number of broad and beautiful roads, such as the Mount Road, leading five miles to St. Thomas’s Mount.”

Even with a population then estimated at 700,000, Madras seemed more pastoral than urban. The wide avenues were “lined with cocoa-nut groves, gardens of all tropical trees and fruits, graceful villas, and crossed and recrossed by different streams that meander through the city.” The writer describes “lovely vistas of valley and meadow and grove and spire” and “scenes of sequestered beauty that realize something of the ideal of your Robinson Crusoe-reading childhood.”

Much has changed in the last 150 years, but some things have not. On visiting a large school, the American writes of the hundreds of students, both girls and boys: “It was pleasing to see their eagerness for knowledge, which would have shamed multitudes of school-boys in our own favored land.” One wonders what American readers of the time who had never been in India made of all this. For Americans living in Chennai today, it is wonderful to read and recognize their compatriot’s descriptions of “the monstrous boulder that stood almost poised on the rounding slope” of Mamallapuram, the ice house that they know as Vivekanandar Illam, and the eager students that are the future of the great city.

Letters to the Editor

Following are excerpts from two of the many letters we received in response to the October-November 2008 issue of “In Touch South India.”

Dear Mr. Kaplan and colleagues,

Nice issue devoted to travels and connecting. When you have a sentence like, *All in all, what emerged was that even in second-tier cities there is a strong sense of connection to the United States and a recognition of common values, common interests and a common destiny that bind together two nations on opposite sides of the globe*, it reminds me of my days as a student in Trivandrum in the 1960s when USIS gave us that strong sense of connection.

Cheers, John Thomas

From the editor: It was nice to hear from you and know that we are “connecting” with our newsletter. While the name USIS is gone, its functions continue to be carried out by the U.S. Consulate General-Chennai and the American Library. We also continue to value our relationships with USIS-era friends like you, especially teachers whose influence and contributions to society are so great.

Dear Mr. Kaplan:

It has been a pleasure for me to have worked in the American Consulate for over 35 years, having joined the US govt service in 1950, and retired in 1985 as the Director of the American Library (est. in 1947, coinciding with Indian independence). This writer had the unique privilege of associating himself with the Library’s formative years, and had witnessed a phenomenal growth in its services and usage. The Library came to be recognized as the meeting place of intellectuals. With the hi-tech professionalism that has now taken over, no wonder the Library’s response for any reference query is instant. Sincerely, R. Thiruvengadam

From the editor: We are proud of the American Library and the role it played in the first half century of India’s independence as a “meeting place of intellectuals,” thanks in large part to your efforts. Today the emphasis has shifted slightly: with all the young school kids we bring in, it is now a “place where intellectuals develop.” But our commitment to service to the people of South India of all stripes remains a constant.

Let us hear from you!

Please write us to let us know what you like, don’t like, want to see in future editions, or simply to provide your perspective on an article in this edition. Instructions for reaching us are at the bottom of this page. Also, have your friends contact us by e-mail if they would like to subscribe to In Touch South India.